

March 18, 2015

Education Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Raised H. B. No. 7020

Legislators and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Kate Vallo and I am the Program Director of Community Children's Center (CCC), a community-based nonprofit early care and education center for children ages 18 months through five years old. CCC is a high quality program accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and it is a School Readiness (SR) site.

I am writing to you in support of raised House Bill 7020. This bill represents a timely opportunity for the state of Connecticut to address wage inequality for teachers of our youngest citizens. Making a sensible and durable plan to address low early childhood teacher wages will enable these professionals to stay in the field of early childhood education once they have earned their bachelor degree, as they will all be required to do by 2020. This will ultimately have a significant positive impact on early childhood program quality.

Teacher retention and low teacher turnover is critical to ensuring quality in early childhood programs. While the state of Connecticut's efforts to elevate and professionalize the field by raising the bar for early childhood teacher qualifications are to be applauded, the truth is that the early childhood system operates outside of the capital market, and there is no clear answer for how to raise the wages of these very low paid professionals. (Currently, early childhood professionals earn wages equivalent or less than those of fast food employees, gas station attendants, and hotel clerks.) It is not possible for centers to simply charge more so that they can pay higher qualified professionals more, and families are already paying as much as they can possibly afford for their children to attend early childhood programs; it is not simply a matter of supply and demand. Creative solutions are necessary. H.B. 7020 addresses this issue directly by requiring "the Office of Early Childhood to develop a plan regarding the implementation of the staff qualifications requirements for staff members of early childhood education programs." A plan is sorely needed.

Perhaps I should have made a plan, myself, when I entered this field 19 years ago. At first, young and probably suffering from a slight case of idealism, I made an active choice to pursue professional and personal growth over financial growth. This was work that I loved, and I followed my heart. Fast forward through five years of teaching preschool and living paycheck to

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paycheck, and I allowed for the possibility that maybe money mattered. I read course descriptions and reviews of graduate programs and picked one that I felt would not waste even one of my dollars. I delved into my studies in hopes of finding another career path that would be equally satisfying, *AND* pay the bills. Instead, while earning my Master's degree in Education, I learned even more fully about the value of high quality early education, and I became even more passionate about my work. So, here I am, now in an administrative role, with a family of my own, making a meager salary and still paying off student debt. I have taken side jobs and relied on my husband to help make ends meet, and it has been, and continues to be challenging.

I spend my days making voices heard, as I know so many of you do as well. Now is the time to listen hard to what the early care and education community is saying about the fractures in our system. We need a creative solution to create funding streams that ensure early childhood teacher wages commensurate to the work that is being done. This is a critical step in ensuring that every child that attends an early learning program in the state of Connecticut has an opportunity to learn, meaningfully, in a rich, high quality environment. If we do not find a way to hire and retain highly skilled, professional teachers with the required qualifications, the opportunities for our children will be lost, and an already unbalanced system will be at even greater risk.

Please support H.B. 7020.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and for the work you do on behalf of the young learners in our state. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, or if you wish to discuss anything further.

Sincerely,

*Kate Vallo*, M.Ed.